

# **The Political Framework for Creation and Development of Bilingual Kindergartens in Berlin**

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## **Introduction**

In spring 2002, we celebrated the inauguration of the first German-Russian-Jewish kindergarten in Berlin. Nowadays, there are seven bilingual German-Russian kindergartens with 460 places and 78 bilingual kindergartens with other combinations of languages [SENBWF]. Maybe it is not enough, taking into account the large proportion of immigrants in the population of Berlin<sup>1</sup>. And yet, much progress has been achieved, endorsing the fact that German society has begun to change its attitude towards other languages on its territory. The initial request for German monolingualism first changed into societal tolerance of multilingualism and eventually to the recognition of the value of multilingualism. This process is a very slow one, and it is not yet complete.

In my article, I would like to look at the development in the last few years of the political framework that has made possible, on the one hand, the opening of bilingual kindergartens in Berlin, and on the other hand, to consider what has hampered this process until now. I would like to emphasise three most important political spheres: linguistic, educational and integrational.

## **Changes in Linguistic Policy**

At the end of the 1970s in Germany the public discourse was more and more about qualitative and quantitative deficiencies in people's proficiency in the languages of European Union countries and of foreign languages altogether. This negative assessment was based above all on two arguments. The first one: the mutual understanding of European Union citizens and their social unity cannot develop if those citizens are not able to communicate with each other.

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1 In the 'Berlin's Integration concept' [Berliner Integrationskonzept: 1] we read: "Today, about 40% of all children and young people under 18 in Berlin originate from immigrant families".

The second argument: the economic relationships of EU countries depend upon the linguistic competence of the partners. With globalisation in the development of economic relationships this argument was growing in significance.

By the end of the 1980s, the European Union apparatus started to engage with questions of multilingualism and to address the issues of the unsatisfactory situation with respect to language learning. Different projects were elaborated, aiming at bi- and multilingualism. In the White Paper on *Education and training, teaching and learning. Towards the learning society* (1995) the goal was formulated for the first time, according to which, every citizen of the European Union should acquire three European languages (i.e. languages of EU countries): their own one plus two other official languages of the European Union. During the European Union summits in Lisbon in 2000 and in Barcelona in 2002, this aim was confirmed and generalised in the formula 'mother tongue plus two foreign languages.' Everyone engaged with language policy refers to this formula.

If we look at the history of the development of this formula, we will understand that applying it to what languages should be learned, it can be and was interpreted differently, and it has created a debate in the field of language policy until the present. In the new EU documents [Europäischer Sprachenrat 2003 Abschlussbericht; Europäisches Parlament 2006 Rahmenstrategie Mehrsprachigkeit], besides European languages, regional, minority, migrants' and third-country citizens' languages are mentioned, but not always and not as a priority. This situation can be illustrated with the example of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, as well as by the fact that the Russian language is more and more being counted along with the English, Spanish and Chinese as a language of intercultural communication and as an international language.

It is a difficult task to achieve the goal of 'mother tongue plus two foreign languages' for every citizen of the EU. It can be solved through implementation of a steady policy. The public discussion about how to achieve this goal puts as the highest priority the need to learn foreign languages at an *early* age. This fact leads us to the second political sphere which has a great importance for the creation of the bilingual pre-school institutions, namely to education policy, to kindergarten policy. From the outset, it is clear that European Union directives on language policy are executed by each EU member state at its own discretion and similarly, directives cannot be put into operation at the national level in Germany because cultural and educational policy is in the hands of the respective Federal State governments.

## Changes in Education Policy

In the Federal Republic of Germany, contrary to the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, day care centres were for a long time not considered to be part of the education system. They were under the department of youth affairs, and thereby a part of the governmental subdivision of social welfare for the poor and citizens with restricted abilities. In recent times, opinion about the functions of pre-school institutions has changed significantly. To the great satisfaction of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, a consensus was reached in the debate that day care is the 'initial step in the education system' [Meng]. The educational tasks of the kindergarten are in principle politically no longer in dispute, although discussions and negotiations are still conducted upon how these educational tasks can be understood and solved [Laewen et al.]. These changes were perhaps stimulated by innovations in the pre-school pedagogy of the other countries<sup>2</sup>, as well as the state of the German education system which provokes concern. The necessity to undertake a fundamental educational reform became more and more evident and was corroborated by the international PISA assessment.

In 1999, the Federal government appointed a commission which had to elaborate the concept of educational reform, the so-called 'Education Forum'. Representatives of the federal ministries, federal states, research, church, and other experts worked in this commission. After two years, the 'Education Forum' presented its recommendations for the reform of the education system. These recommendations were based upon structural changes currently happening in all spheres of life and activity and leading to the formation of the 'knowledge society'. Thus the main goal of the education system reform consists in the development of a culture of knowledge acquisition and teaching, increasing motivation and the capacity for independent life-long acquisition of knowledge and giving the joyful sense of the success [Empfehlungen: 4]. The 'Education

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2 Bredekamp published in 1987 in the USA a leaflet entitled "Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through eight" which became one of the most influential documents on early education [Kunze & Gisbert: 48]. It caused a discussion and later debate about the pre-school system in the German Democratic Republic resulting in the creation of two big programmes with scientific as well as educational and political goals: an international research association called "International child care and education study" [Tietze: 37] and a project "Kindersituationen – Weiterentwicklung der pädagogischen Arbeit in Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder in den neuen Bundesländern und im Ostteil Berlins" (1993–1997) [Laewen et al. 1997: 8]. Discussions of the concept of the kindergarten in the German Democratic Republic are significant for the Russian-speaking migrants, because the pre-school pedagogy in the GDR had lots of common features with the pre-school pedagogy in the USSR.

Forum' considers the development of very young children and the education of immigrants as being the priority aims of the education reform.

In the kindergartens, the spontaneous striving of children for knowledge should be recognized and supported. In particular, the extraordinary abilities of pre-school age children to learn and to refine their German language and to acquire foreign languages should be utilised. This should take place in accordance with age-appropriate and individual capacities of the child. For that purpose, in-depth investigations and teachers' continuing education are necessary.

With respect to the education of migrants, it is argued that the support and integration of migrants should become the core element of education at all levels. Other cultures and languages should be understood as enrichment and an opportunity for foreign and German children. The German education system should guarantee acquisition of adequate knowledge of the German language to all migrants [Empfehlungen: 21]. The next recommendation says that an intensified support for multilingual development with reference to the mother tongue starting in day care centres should be provided by the federal government, federal states and local communities [ibid. –22].

These and other similar recommendations issued at the meeting of Ministers of Youth Affairs and at the meeting of the Ministers of Culture and Education in 2004 served as a basis for the 'General plan of the Federal States for teaching at early age in pre-school institutions' (Gemeinsamer Rahmen). At the same time, the first time in the history of the (old) FRG, the Federal States elaborated their own educational programmes for the children in pre-school institutions.

In all these documents, assistance with speech development is considered the most important educational sphere. The aim is to make linguistic competence the key qualification, and linguistic competence is called the 'key competence', because it is a prerequisite for successful participation in any educational processes and in the formation of civil society. Thus, assistance with language development has to become a 'principle' in the functioning of the pre-school institutions. Yet, the talk about linguistic competence as a key qualification refers almost always only to the German language.

The State of Berlin has reacted with different initiatives with respect to the necessity for a fundamental educational system reform in general and of the pre-school institutions system in particular. In 2005, "the Law <...> upon the further development of the care and rearing of children <...> in the institutions for children" [Kindertagesbetreuungsreformgesetz: 322] was passed. In this law, the aims and goals of the pre-school institutions are formulated as follows:

(1) Kindergartens and nurseries, like social-pedagogical institutions, complement and support the child's education in the family <...>. The developmental programme focuses upon education, upbringing and care of children. Pre-school institutions should grant children equal educational opportunities regardless of their gender, ethnic or religious affiliation, social and economic position of their parents and regardless of their individual capacities. As far as possible, there they should counterbalancesmooth over social injustice <...>

(2) Pre-school institutions should consider the individual requirements and the living environment of the child and his/her family. Children should be given support during the formation and development of motor skills, cognitive, social and aesthetic abilities, in perception of the surrounding world outside of the children's institution; the support for the German language learning belongs here.

(3) The programme for education and upbringing of pre-school institutions should be directed especially toward:

1. preparation of the child to live in the society in which great significance is attributed to knowledge, linguistic competence, intellectual curiosity, the wish and ability to study, the capacity to solve problems;

2. preparation of the child to live in a democratic society that needs active, responsible citizens, brought up in the spirit of tolerance, mutual acceptance and peaceful disposition [Kindertagesbetreuungsreformgesetz: 322].

This definition of the main goals of pre-school education is compulsory for all types of day-care institutions with all forms of property in the State of Berlin.

These goals are realised by the owner of a children's institution. S/he signs a contract with the Senate according to which s/he pledges herself/himself to guarantee and develop quality in accordance with the tasks of pre-school education. The basis for the agreement is the pedagogical concept of the owner in which s/he expounds their methods for the realisation of the general goals of pre-school education and defines the specific goals and tasks of the particular children's institution. The State of Berlin then declares its readiness to complete an agreement with the owner of a children's institution concerning the approval of the pedagogical and other models [ibid. – 328]. In this Law, bilingual pre-school institutions are not mentioned.

Almost at the same time as the Law on the reform of the pre-school institutions was adopted, the 'Berlin educational programme' (Berliner Bildungs-

programm) for pre-school institutions was elaborated, published and proclaimed as compulsory. It assumes that the main goals of pre-school education should be realised as concrete curricula. It formulates goals for teachers' activity, defines educational spheres, describes possible pedagogical actions and puts questions for the analysis of child development. The *goals* are the development of the child's personality and formation of the following competences: personal, social, subject-oriented competence, and with the teaching methods. The goals formulated in the 'Berlin educational programme' seem to be, the most interesting basis for discussion and debate during teachers' and parents' meetings and are of interest for those educators and parents who have until now not had enough experience of living in a democratic society. The *educational spheres* relate educational goals with educational *contents* of various kinds. In the 'Berlin educational programme', seven different educational spheres are presented. To sustain language development means, on the one hand, an unalterable principle of support for verbal development, and on the other hand, it is an autonomous educational sphere. This educational sphere is called 'Communication: languages, literary culture, and the mass-media'. In this part of the programme language is understood as a means of communication in different spheres of activity: it develops in real life, which means in practical and verbal interactions with other people, adults and children [Berliner Bildungsprogramm: 62-63].

In other words, children acquire language while interacting verbally. At the same time they learn what linguistic tools to implement to express various language functions. Children acquire language only if they are given sufficient opportunities to participate in motivating verbal interactions of very different kinds [Wode; Rehbein & Meng].

Though this understanding of language acquisition refers to every language, the reference is made again to the German language only. The 'Berlin educational programme' does not deal with bilingual education. Nevertheless, the active or passive experience of multilingualism among a great number of Berlin children is taken into account. That is why the educational sphere 'Communication: languages, literal culture, and the mass-media' in accordance with the 'Berlin educational programme' embraces also the task of teaching children to perceive and to acknowledge multilingualism.

The 'Berlin educational programme' introduces many interesting propositions about how *kindergarten teachers can achieve educational tasks* in the sphere of 'Communication: languages, literal culture, and the mass-media' by departing from evidence about language development and existence of multi-

lingualism in the life of children. This chapter of the programme could be a valuable piece of reading for analysis and discussions by educators and parents.

One should pay special attention to the sections where *questions for the analysis of the child development* are formulated. The 'Berlin educational programme', as well as the educational programmes of other Lands, starts from the point that children develop independently, interacting with their environment. Adults can support child development by creating a stimulating environment that enhances their activity and impels children to make efforts. This should happen continuously in accordance with the individual development of a child and her or his tendencies. Such an understanding of child development assigns a major role to observation in the educational process. Yet, adults, parents and educators do not initially have a sufficient capacity for observation. At first they must be taught to observe. That is why the 'Berlin programme' contains questions for use in the observation of child development in each educational sphere. These questions should help adults to perceive and to document child development with the goal of putting together a plan for concrete actions on every occasion and to implement this plan in daily life.

Let us summarize the results of the language policy in the kindergartens of the State of Berlin. Neither the Law on the pre-school institutions reform, nor the 'Berlin educational programme' foresees the bilingual education of pre-school children. Supporting verbal development means, first of all, assistance in the acquisition of the German language. Yet, the bilingual education of children is not excluded. The owners of pre-school institutions have the right to use special educational curricula and to organize bilingual day-care centres as well. The Berlin documents on pre-school education formulate for these and other types of pre-school institutions stimulating principles, which could be discussed through analysis and evaluation of different traditions of pre-school pedagogy. This task is always the focus at turning-points for a society and/ or when, in the case of migration, a necessity emerges to compare traditions of two societies and two linguistic communities.

## Changes in the Integration Policy

To conclude, let us look at the changes in the German integration policy, in the context of which bilingual German-Russian day care centres are also placed. Today, the situation is perceived, for the first time in the history of Germany, through the recently adopted National Plan for the Integration of Migrants [Integrationsplan], in which all the initiatives of the Federation, of the States, of

the communal authorities and of individual citizens are brought together. The integration of migrants requires the application of collective, systematic and sequential efforts by the whole society. Integration does not happen on its own. This is an important lesson taken from the many years of experience of immigration to Germany. Eventually, the fact was acknowledged that in past years, diverse, often serious problems have arisen in the integration of migrants. The National Plan for the Integration of Migrants puts it like this: "some migrants do not speak German well enough, make poor progress in school, meet with failure while acquiring professional education and often remain without a job. In addition, some migrants do not accept the main rules agreed upon in our society. <...> We have to avoid the deadlock of a great number of the young migrants caused through lack of prospects and of attention from society and absence of policy towards their problems. <...> Otherwise cooperation risks will end up in a confrontation" [Integrationsplan: 12] In the National Plan, different ways of amelioration of the migrants' integration process are indicated. The main among them are 'integration through education' and 'education through language'.

Verbal development support is understood in the National Plan for the Integration of Migrants basically in terms of measurement of the acquisition of the German language. It is applicable even for FörMig, which is "The Federal and States programme for the support of children and youth from migrant families" and was elaborated by the Commission of the Federation and States (= BLK) for the development of education and research. The advertising leaflet of the programme proclaims: "Multilingualism as a resource. Children and teenagers from migrant families live in the majority of cases in bi- and multilingual environments. Languages spoken in their families are of great importance for them. Therefore, multilingualism in FörMig-projects is a starting condition to support language development. The multilingualism of children and teenager migrants is considered not to be an obstacle, but a rich source of linguistic experience and language development in a world which is becoming more and more international" [BLK: para 1].

The Federal States on the basis of the National Plan for the Integration of Migrants developed their own integration programmes starting from the characteristic problems of migrants living on their territory. These programmes identify concrete problems and propose potential ways of resolving them. The 'Berlin integration programme' sees in the education of migrants and their children the main prerequisite for successful integration. It formulates one of the eight main action strategies as follows: "To recognize and to support talents:



successful integration policy defines in a new fashion the main educational task of pre-school institutions and schools" [Integrationskonzept: 6].

The following statements about the contribution of kindergartens to the integration of migrants seem to be important and worth discussion:

(1) "Bilingualism is an important competence of many children from migrant families. <...> The education system especially has to take into account and support bilingualism" [ibid. – 35].

(2) "Assistance with the development of communicative ability is the main goal of the early age children's education. This embraces in the first instance systematic learning of the German language up to the level necessary for the following successful studies at school. In order to reach this goal, the Senate has elaborated a series of measures. <...>" [ibid. – 36]. These measures include "further education of the educational staff, a corresponding reform of the social pedagogy course, creation of documentation of children's language development by educators and realization of the language tests for assessment of the language proficiency level with the goal of developing different language teaching methods" [ibid. – 35-36].

(3) Active involvement of parents in the educational process: parents have to be more intensively acquainted with the institutions of the society where they live, including pre-school institutions and schools: "They get the opportunity to formulate their own expectations and demands. The educational system becomes more transparent and understandable; parents will participate more actively in the formation of the educational career of their children" [ibid. – 35].

These definitions from the 'Berlin integration programme' give to parents of different migrant groups initiative and freedom of action which they can realize in practice.

The political framework for bilingual educational institutions includes certainly not only political documents, but also the opinions of researchers and attitudes of various organisations. In this sense, the institutional support of bilingualism in Germany still remains a moot point (see materials of the Symposium 'Streitfall Zweisprachigkeit' organised by the Institute of Comparative Pedagogy at Hamburg University on 19-20.10.2007).

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